

# **Missed Opportunities Northern Students Heading South**

Prepared for the  
Northern Labour Market Information Clearinghouse

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# Missed Opportunities - Northern Students Heading South

## Introduction

In the Fall of 1996, about 6100 students from the Clearinghouse region attended colleges and technical institutes in Alberta full-time. Roughly one-quarter (1562) of those students chose to attend institutions outside of the Clearinghouse region. This group represents an opportunity for the Clearinghouse partners to increase their enrollments by learning more about the needs of potential students in their own service areas. By examining a combination of statistical data and student surveys conducted in the past few years, this report seeks to answer three central questions about the northern students attending colleges outside the region:

1. Where did they go?
2. What programs did they take?
3. Why did they choose to go there?

## *Findings Summary*

The first two questions are answered easily using the statistical information at hand. The third will require further, more specific, research. Even so, the existing studies do provide useful ideas.

- The most popular choices for students heading out of the region are: NAIT, Grant MacEwan Community College, Red Deer College and SAIT.
- The most popular program choices for this group are: Business Administration, Bachelor of Arts, UT: Bachelor of Arts and College Preparation.
- In spite of survey results stating that availability of programs and closeness to home are the most important factors in students' choice of institutions, most of the top ten courses taken outside the region are also offered by at least one of the Clearinghouse partners. Two exceptions to this are Community Health Care and Instrumentation Technology.

## Methods

This report attempts to answer the above questions by examining two forms of available data. The first is data from Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development's (AECD's) Common Information System (CIS) on the geographic sources of students registered as of the fall of 1996. CIS information lists full-time students at Alberta colleges and technical institutes by their institution and program as well as by the community from which they come. These figures for all full-time students in the fall of 1996 were broken down to show students from communities inside the Clearinghouse region. Data for students from these communities who attended outside institutions were then broken down by the standard names of the students' programs (data for students at AVC - Lac La Biche were from 1995 due to technical problems with that college's 1996 data). University data come from "Fact Sheets" produced by the Universities of Alberta, Calgary and Lethbridge for the fall of 1995.

The second set of information is a set of surveys conducted by different groups between 1995 and 1997 that asked grade 12 students and recent high school graduates about their plans (or

current status) in terms of post-secondary education. Of the four student surveys cited in this report, two were province-wide studies conducted, at least in part, by AECD. In December, 1995, AECD conducted a survey of recent high school graduates, asking them about their choices for life after high school and focussing on the factors that influenced graduates' decisions about careers and education. In the spring of 1996, AECD worked with Alberta Education and the University of Alberta's Population Research Laboratory to survey grade 12 students in Alberta schools, this time looking at the transition from school to work. Both of these surveys tell something about the reasons for students' post-secondary choices, but neither one provides information specifically about northern students.

The other two surveys did look at students in northern jurisdictions. Grande Prairie Regional College conducted a survey of grade 9 and grade 12 Catholic School students in Grande Prairie in 1995. While this study focussed on the students' plans with respect to GPRC in particular, the results included some salient points for the Clearinghouse region in general. The Peace River School Division conducted a survey of Grade 12 students in June of 1997, asking them about their plans following graduation but did not go into the reasons for their decisions.

## Findings

### *Where are They Going?*

The first table compares the results of the four student surveys, showing the percentages of students headed to post-secondary education, and the type of institution they chose.

Table 1: Comparison of Student Survey Results

| Plans or Current Status                   | 1995 High School Survey | 1996 HS Graduate Survey | 1995 GPRC Gr. 12 Survey | 1997 PRSD Gr. 12 Survey |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Attending Post-Secondary                  | 59%                     | 63%                     | 81%                     | 55%                     |
| Degree-Granting Institution*              | 49%                     | 46%                     | 42% of total sample     | 31%                     |
| Community College or Technical Institute* | 35%                     | 45%                     | 39% of total sample     | 59%                     |
| Apprenticeship*                           | 5%                      | 4%                      | ---                     | 4%                      |
| Other*                                    | 7%                      | 5%                      | 9% of total sample      | 4%                      |
| Back in High School                       | 9%                      | 16%                     | ---                     | 5%                      |
| Not In School                             | 30%                     | 21%                     | 10%                     | 33%                     |

\*Percentages listed are of those planning to attend or attending Post-secondary, except for GPRC survey.

### *Northern Students Leaving the Region*

As the following table shows, students from the Clearinghouse region as a whole (other than those going to university) were most likely to have attended one of four outside institutions in 1996: NAIT, Grant MacEwan Community College, Red Deer College or SAIT. These four have 1231 of the 1562 northern students attending colleges outside of the region. CIS data shows no northern students attending AVC - Calgary full-time.

Table 2: Northern Students at Southern Institutions

| Institution (Colleges/Technical Institutes)   | No. of students from the Clearinghouse Region (Fall 1996 figures) |
|---|---|
| NAIT  | 474   |
| Grant MacEwan Community College               | 289   |
| Red Deer College                              | 278   |
| SAIT  | 190   |
| Mount Royal College                           | 77  |
| Lethbridge Community College                  | 70  |
| Augustana University College                  | 59  |
| Olds College                                  | 45  |
| Concordia University College of Alberta       | 34  |
| AVC - Edmonton                                | 28  |
| Medicine Hat College                          | 10  |
| The King's University College                 | 7   |
| Alberta College of Art and Design             | 1   |
| <b>Total (Colleges, Technical Institutes)</b> | <b>1562</b>   |
| Universities                                  | No. of Students from the Clearinghouse Region (Fall 1995 figures) |
| University of Alberta                         | 2033  |
| University of Calgary                         | 246   |
| University of Lethbridge                      | 221*  |
| <b>Total (all institutions)</b>               | <b>4062</b>   |

\*Figure is for all northern Census Divisions, which include many communities not in the Clearinghouse region.

### *Choice of Institution by Partner Region*

The chart below shows the relative popularity of southern colleges for students from each of the Clearinghouse partners' regions. The colleges listed are the most popular for students from the

Clearinghouse region as a whole, and for most of the members' service regions. The one exception to this is that there were 20 students from the Fairview College region at Mount Royal College and only 13 at GMCC.

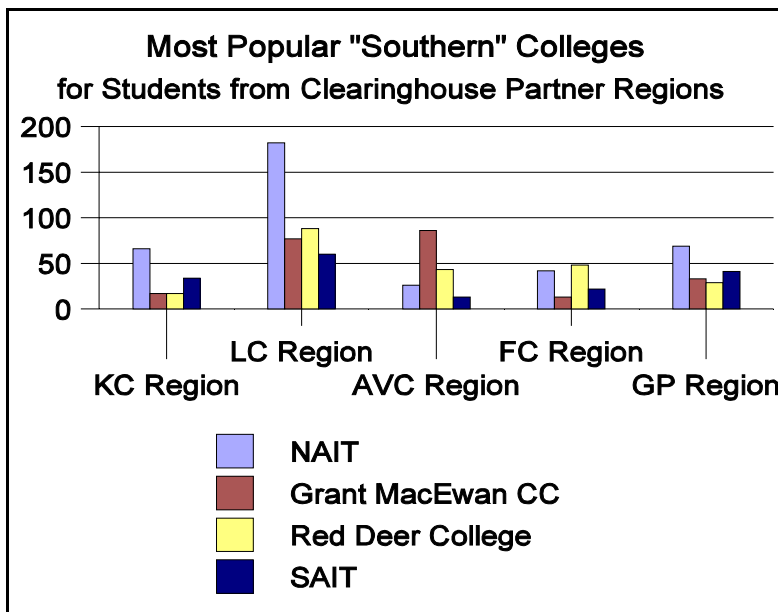


Figure 1: Institutional Choices by Partner Region.

### *What Are They Taking?*

A 1995 provincial survey found that the top two reasons behind students' choices of post-secondary institutions were program availability and closeness to home. This may not be the case for the students examined in this study however. Of the ten most popular programs taken by northerners outside of the region, seven were available at Clearinghouse partner institutions. Surveys point out several other reasons that may have led students to leave the region. Those reasons include: tuition levels, institutions' reputations and facilities and the students' desire to get away from home.

The following table shows the most common programs (by Standard Name) for northern students to take outside of the Clearinghouse region. The table also shows the number of northern students taking the same programs at Clearinghouse partner institutions. In some cases, students attending Clearinghouse colleges may be registered elsewhere if they are taking courses brokered in from outside institutions. In addition to those cases noted below, there were 10 students taking Lethbridge Community College's Travel and Tourism courses at Keyano College (they were registered at LCC).

## Top 10 Programs Taken at Out-of-Region Colleges by Northern Students

| Program (Standard Name)    | No. of Northern Students Outside of Region | No. of Northern Students at Clearinghouse Institutions |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| Business Administration    | 92   | 297  |
| Bachelor of Arts           | 63   | 8  |
| UT: Bachelor of Arts       | 63   | 144  |
| Emergency Medical Services | 57*  | 6*   |
| College Preparation        | 46   | 4**  |
| Social Work                | 43*  | 21*  |
| Community Health Care      | 42   | 0  |
| Instrumentation Technology | 39   | 0  |
| UT: Bachelor of Science    | 39   | 138  |
| Bachelor of Science        | 36   | 0  |

\*Many students in these courses attended AVC - LSL but took courses brokered from SAIT or GMCC. This includes 16 EMT students and an undetermined number (33 FTE) of Social Work students. Those students were registered at the outside institutions.

\*\*Partners do offer related programs under different Standard Names.

These figures also show some possible opportunities for partners to expand their programming. From the list above, the following programs had few or zero students taking them at Clearinghouse institutions:

- College Preparation
- Community Health Care
- Instrumentation Technology
- Bachelor of Science

Students in these programs accounted for over ten per cent of the northern students who left the region for college or technical study. These may be examples of students leaving primarily for the sake of program availability and could thus be kept in the region if those programs were offered here.

For more details on students' choices, see Appendix A.

### ***Why Did They Choose to Go There?***

Three out of the four surveys discussed here asked students or graduates why they chose to attend a particular post-secondary institution. These studies do not tell the full story about northern Alberta students but they do provide some useful ideas.

### *1995 High School Survey*

- The 1995 High School Survey found that for all respondents together, the most important criteria for choosing a particular post-secondary institution were: program (27%), closeness to home (25%) and reputation and facilities (14%).
- For students from outside of Calgary and Edmonton the reasons shifted slightly. The top choices for those students were: program (36%), closeness to home (15%) and lower tuition (14%).
- Rural students were less likely to continue their education than were those from Calgary or Edmonton. Those rural students who planned to go on to post-secondary education were more likely to choose colleges or technical institutes than were their urban counterparts.

### *1996 Graduate Survey*

- This survey found that socio-economic backgrounds and the program taken in high school influenced the respondents level of belief in the value of university versus college education. Those whose fathers had professional/managerial jobs were more likely than others to believe that a university degree would be valuable.
- Both parents and students favour university over trades/technology training, parents more so than students and women more than men. University also finds more favour in large cities than in smaller centres.

### *GPRC Survey*

- Students expressed two main reasons why they chose to go away from Grande Prairie for their post-secondary education. The first, not surprisingly, was that the program they wanted was not available. The second, and perhaps more common if one includes variations on the theme, was that they wanted to go away from Grande Prairie. While moving away from home can add to the cost of education, many students find this to be a good opportunity to see another part of the province or country, or just to get out from under the parental roof.

## **Sources**

Alberta Advanced Education & Career Development, "1995 High School Survey Final Report", May, 1997.

Lowe, Graham S., Krahn, Harvey and Bowlby, Jeff, "1996 Alberta High School Graduate Survey Report of Research Findings", School-Work Transition Project, Report 97-1. Alberta Education, AECD, Population Research Laboratory, Department of Sociology, University of Alberta, January, 1997.

Scott McAlpine, "High School Student Plans and GPRC: Grade 9 and Grade 12 Catholic School Students", Integrated Research Unit: Grande Prairie Regional College, July, 1995.

Peace River School Division No. 10, "Grade 12 Student Intent Survey, 1996/97 School Year", 1997.

Universities of Alberta, Calgary and Lethbridge, "Fact Books", 1995.



## Appendix A

### Count of Full-time Students from Each of the Clearinghouse Partners' Regions Attending Outside Institutions, by Standard Name of Program

The following tables List the number of students from each of the partners' regions enrolled in a particular program at a particular institution.

- The college listed at the top of the page indicates the students' home region.
- "Institution Name" lists the college attended.
- "Standard Name" lists the program enrolled in.
- "Sum of Count\_Unique\_St..." shows the number enrolled in that program at that institution.